

SECTION 10: RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION NEEDS AND SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATION #2: Water Use Classification of Landscape Species IV (WUCOLS IV) Support

Background

The publication Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) is a guide to the water needs of landscape plants in California. First developed in 1991, the document has been revised/updated twice, with the third edition (WUCOLS III) being supported and published by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) in 1999. In each new edition, additional species were evaluated and included. Since 2010, this publication has become a standard reference for selecting the most water-efficient plants and is the de facto reference source by the California Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWEL0; AB 1881).

In 2013, under the leadership of the California Center for Urban Horticulture, UC Davis, the WUCOLS III plant list was reviewed and updated with an additional 1600 plus taxonomic plant groups (taxa), bringing the total to 3,546 taxa in the database. Funding support for that project (WUCOLS IV), was provided by DWR and stakeholders in the California horticulture industry and allowed for the development and implementation of an online searchable database (<http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/>). The WUCOLS IV database has been online for two years and Google Analytics metrics have increased by 200% for the number of sessions, and by 228% for the number of users for 2014-2015.

Leveraging internet technology enabled the WUCOLS IV plant list to be accessible not only to horticultural professionals, but also to the general public. Feedback on the WUCOLS IV database from horticultural professionals has been overwhelmingly positive. The ability to search by specific city, water use (very low, low, moderate & high) and by plant category allows the user to create custom downloadable plant lists, which facilitates irrigating plants with similar water needs efficiently in the landscape. The most frequent request voiced by horticultural professionals is the need for an institutionalized process for updating and adding to the online plant list. Such a process does not exist. Over time, the lack of a predictable process for adding new plant varieties and their water use information to the WUCOLS list could discourage further investment in the development and commercialization of new water-efficient plants in California.

Feedback from the general public has been less positive than from the horticultural professionals, for the general public lacks the horticultural knowledge of plant appearance and cultural information. Unfortunately, WUCOLS IV funding could not support the addition of plant photographs and descriptions to the database, features that would enable the general public to utilize this online resource tool. Thus, the addition of plant photographs and descriptions to the WUCOLS IV database is considered by the Independent Technical Panel to be a critical enhancement to WUCOLS, offering essential information to the gardening public for identifying and selecting water-wise plant material for California landscapes.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that WUCOLS is made more useful to the general public and is kept up to date to accommodate new varieties of water-efficient plants. To enhance the consumer utility of the database and to ensure that a stale list does not inadvertently prevent the

introduction and installation of new water-efficient plants, legislation should authorize and direct DWR to review, update, and improve the WUCOLS IV online database, including each of the following:

- Expansion of the entries in the database to include a photograph, narrative description, and key cultural information (i.e., full sun, partial shade, etc.) for each entry;
- Establishment and implementation of a regular process to add new plant taxa to the listing, and to make corrections to existing listings where necessary.

The Independent Technical Panel Recommends That:

The Water Conservation in Landscaping Act (*Government Code*, Article 10.8, sections 65591 – 65599), should be amended to direct the DWR to do the following:

1. Review and revise the WUCOLS list to consider the addition of unlisted plant taxa and to correct known errors in existing listings, no less frequently than once every three years.
2. Provide the following additional information for each listed plant taxa in the WUCOLS database:
 - a) a photograph
 - b) a narrative description, and
 - c) key cultural information.

Information specified by this paragraph shall be added to the database within five years at a rate not less than 20% of entries per year in each fiscal year beginning July 1, 2017.